

# 辩论

## Discussion Paper

TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION BETWEEN THE  
EUROPEAN UNION, CHINA AND AFRICA: WHAT PROSPECTS  
FOR SOUTH AFRICA?

Anna Katharina Stahl

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## ABSTRACT

This discussion paper aims at advancing the debate around trilateral development cooperation between the European Union (EU), the People's Republic of China (China) and Africa. The discussion on trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and Africa primarily considers the role of the EU as a traditional donor and that of China as an emerging donor, while failing to grasp the potential of African actors. This paper addresses this analytical gap by examining the role of South Africa in a potential trilateral development partnership with the EU and China. Analysing the case study of South Africa, this paper also discusses whether trilateral development cooperation could possibly emerge as an alternative policy tool to existing bilateral and multilateral collaboration efforts between the EU and China in fostering African development. It is argued that due to its particular economic and political characteristics, South Africa possesses the potential for launching a trilateral development partnership with the EU and China. Yet, in the absence of existing trilateral projects, some uncertainties around the concept of trilateral cooperation both in terms of conceptualisation and actual practices persist. Only by embarking on first pilot projects, policymakers in South Africa, the EU and China can eventually find out the actual benefits and limitations of what could become a novel type of cooperation.

**Keywords:** Trilateral development cooperation, European Union (EU), China, South Africa

**The author** is a Ph.D. researcher at the Institute for European Studies (IES) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Belgium, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. on the trilateral relations between the EU, China and Africa. Anna holds a M.A. in EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies from the College of Europe in Bruges, where she submitted a Master thesis on the impact of China's Africa policy for the EU. From January to February 2012, Anna was a visiting researcher at the Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS).

E-mail: [Anna.Stahl@vub.ac.be](mailto:Anna.Stahl@vub.ac.be)

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CCS discussion papers should contribute to the academic debate on China's global rise and the consequences thereof for African development. We do therefore explicitly invite scholars from Africa, China, or elsewhere, to use this format for advanced papers that are ready for an initial publication, not least to obtain input from other colleagues in the field. Discussion papers should thus be seen as work in progress, exposed to (and ideally stimulating) policy-relevant discussion based on academic standards. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author.

## **PREFACE**

Cooperation with emerging economies in international development is a topic that is widely discussed in Europe and North America. The debate has a number of reasons: sometimes motivation is about ‘socialising’ emerging economies into international norms, sometimes it is about finding complementarity in cooperation. And, last but not least, some contributions to the debate are motivated by intellectual curiosity in exploiting the potential for mutual learning, be it learning about practices of or norms in cooperation.

On the Chinese side, however, the discussion on trilateral cooperation has been met with rather lukewarm reactions – and, on the African side, with quite a bit of skepticism. African states have, often, expressed their dissatisfaction with being treated rather as an afterthought in the cooperation than as an actor in their own right – arguable the most important one for success of the cooperation – in the triangle that some actors try to create. This has somewhat blinded the debate for a discussion on comparative advantages and political agendas on each side of the debate.

This somewhat explorative discussion paper contributes to the discussion by looking into one case in Africa. South Africa is somewhat special in that it can either be a beneficiary of European-Chinese cooperation – or be a player in any trilateral endeavours beyond its own borders.

The paper was written during Anna Stahl’s visiting fellowship at the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University in January and early February 2012.

Dr Sven Grimm  
Stellenbosch, August 2012

## **TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFD	French Development Agency
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ARF	African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund
AU	African Union
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DIRCO	South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DG	Directorate-General
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EDF	European Development Fund
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EXIM	Chinese Export-Import Bank
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
MOFA	Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOF	Chinese Ministry of Finance
MOFCOM	Chinese Ministry of Commerce
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PRC	People's Republic of China
REC	Regional Economic Communities
SA	South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADPA	South African Development Partnership Agency
SSC	South-South cooperation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USD	US dollars
ZAR	South African rand

## 1. INTRODUCTION

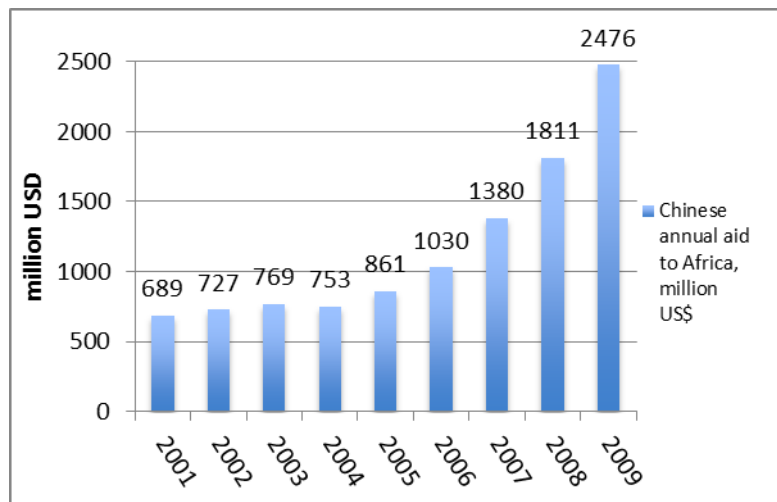
Since the turn of the century, the African continent has entered the limelight of international attention. The public perception of Africa has changed from that of a continent plagued by famines, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and civil wars to that of a supplier of strategic resources and economic opportunities. The global interest in Africa has been largely driven by the growing presence of so-called “emerging countries” or “rising powers” on the continent. The notion of emerging countries is commonly used as a synonym for the BRIC countries. The acronym BRIC was coined in 2001 by the Goldman Sachs Chairman Jim O’Neill as a shorthand for Brazil, Russia, India and China, whom he identified as emerging economic powerhouses of the world (O’Neill 2001). A key aspect of the rise the BRIC countries has been their growing engagement in so-called “South-South cooperation” with developing countries in Africa (Chahoud 2007). After being long-time recipients of development programmes of industrialised countries China, India and Brazil are now becoming themselves emerging donors in Africa.

Within the group of emerging donors, external assistance from the People’s Republic of China (hereafter China) to Africa has attracted the most consideration (Brautigam 2009; Grimm et al. 2011; Lancaster 2007). In proportion to its economy - which is larger than the other three BRIC countries combined in terms of GDP - China’s aid to African countries has increased drastically over the past years (Grimm and Wenping 2012). It would however be inaccurate to consider China a “new actor” in Africa. Already during the Cold War period the Chinese leadership actively supported national independent movements in Africa through development and technical assistance. An important symbol of China’s presence in Africa in the 1950s and 1970s was the construction of the Tazara railway for which the Chinese government spent around 400 to 600 million US dollars (Brautigam 1998: 40; Snow 1988: 154). With the arrival of Deng Xiaoping as China’s new leader and the end of the Cold War, China adopted a less ideologically driven foreign policy and concentrated mostly on its domestic development. This led to China’s retreat from Africa. Yet, as a consequence of China’s modernisation and “going-out policy” of the late 1990s, Chinese leaders recently rediscovered the African continent (Grimm and Wenping 2012). Two key symbols for China’s resurgence in Africa are the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the release of the first official Chinese White Paper on Africa in 2006 (Taylor 2011).

Due to the lack of widespread information on Chinese aid flows (Brautigam 2009; Grimm et al. 2011) and the fact that the Chinese leadership does not comply with the definition of Official Development Aid (ODA) as put forward by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it remains difficult to exactly assess the amount of Chinese external assistance to Africa. However, experts agree that there has been a rapid increase of Chinese aid to Africa since 2000. Figure 1 clearly illustrates this and shows that in 2006 Chinese aid to Africa has reached the threshold of 1 billion US dollars (USD).



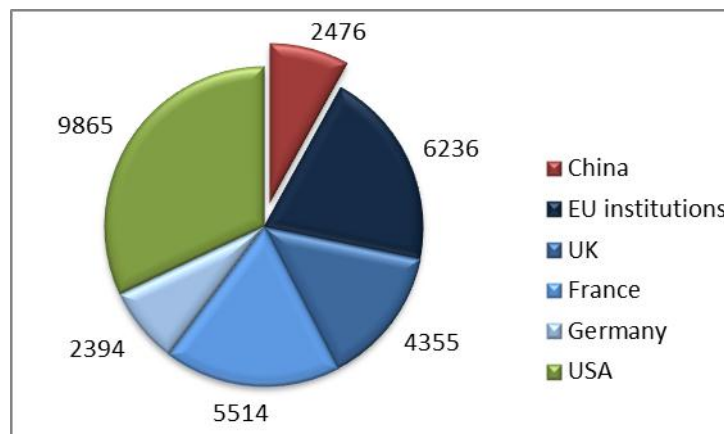
**FIGURE 1: CHINESE AID\* TO AFRICA FROM 2001 TO 2009**



*Source: Brautigam 2009. \* including official budget of the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs for external assistance, concessional loans of the Chinese Eximbank, debt relief*

Despite the impressive expansion of Chinese aid to Africa, figure 2 indicates that in relative terms China is still a minor actor as compared to traditional donors like the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU). In fact, in 2009 the aid provided by China to Africa approximately matched that of Germany. In overall terms, the European Union – which refers to EU institutions and the 27 member states – remains Africa’s largest donors, also compared to the USA. For instance, in 2009 EU institutions together with the three biggest member states in terms of ODA commitments (namely France, United Kingdom and Germany) contributed with 18,499 million USD in ODA, which corresponded to a almost twice the budget provided by the USA in the same year. The predominant role of the European Union as a traditional donor in Africa can be largely explained by the historical legacy of colonialism of some of the founding member states and the growing leadership role played by the European Commission (Carbone 2007).

**Figure 2: 2009 major donors to Africa (ODA commitments in million USD)**



*Source: Brautigam 2009 and OECD statistics (OECD.StatExtracts)*

As the EU has traditionally enjoyed a privileged position in Africa, the rise of China presents a key challenge for it (Berger and Wissenbach 2007; Carbone 2011; Grimm et al. 2009; Hackenesch 2009; Stahl 2011b). It is obvious that the presence of emerging donors in Africa is not just a temporary phenomenon, but rather the expression of an increasingly multipolar world. Hence, the EU has no other option than to adapt to this new situation. Based on this assessment, European policymakers have actively promoted since 2005 various cooperation initiatives with China in Africa, both at bilateral and multilateral level (Berger and Wissenbach 2007; Cooke et al. 2008; Huliaras and Magliveras 2008). At the ninth EU-China summit in 2006, European and Chinese leaders agreed to establish a structured dialogue on Africa (Council of the EU 2006). In parallel, European policymakers tried to engage with China on Africa's development at multilateral level for instance through the OECD's newly created China-DAC Study Group, various UN bodies and the G20. Yet, the most innovative European cooperation proposal in this field has been the 2008 initiative of a trilateral EU, China and Africa dialogue and cooperation (European Commission 2008b).

Against the background of the 2008 EU policy proposal, this paper seeks to examine the potential of trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and Africa. While EU officials promoted their initiative with the objective of moving from a model of EU-China cooperation "on" Africa to a model of cooperation "with" Africa, most of the debate about trilateral development cooperation however largely neglects the role of African partners. Instead, it focuses on the perspective of traditional donors and emerging donors. This paper seeks to address this gap by looking closer at the potential contribution of African partners in trilateral development cooperation. Based on the case of South Africa, this paper investigates the role African partners can play in a new type of trilateral development cooperation with the EU and China. The example of South Africa has been chosen because it represents the most likely African case for a genuine trilateral cooperation. Due to its economic performance and its political agency, South Africa seems most incline to act as an equal partner to the EU and China.

The aim of this paper is to explore the conceptual and practical challenges of trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and South Africa. In particular, it will investigate whether trilateral development cooperation could become an innovative policy instrument to overcome the obstacles of existing bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. The paper is divided into three main sections. Section 2 provides an overview of the concept of trilateral development cooperation and proposes a new interpretation of it. This is followed by a review of the EU's 2008 policy initiative of trilateral development cooperation and the Chinese response to it. Lastly, section 4 will focus on South Africa as a partner for a potential trilateral development partnership with the EU and China.

## **2. CONCEPTUALISING TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

Although trilateral, triangular or tripartite development cooperation has regained popularity in the current political and scholarly debate, the concept lacks a generally accepted definition and only limited theoretical input exists (Grimm et al. 2010a; Pollet et al. 2011; Li and Bonschab 2011). This section provides an overview of the origins of this concept and proposes an original analytical framework of trilateral development cooperation. The notion of “trilateral development cooperation” is referred to in accordance with the terminology of European policy documents.

### **2.1 THE ORIGINS OF TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

In studies of International Relations (IR) the concept of “trilateralism” is generally understood as an organising principle involving three actors. It distinguishes itself from “bilateralism”, which is commonly defined as the conduct of relations between two parties. Thus, trilateral relations imply that developments in each of the three bilateral dyads impact on the other two dyads. Traditionally, development assistance has been distributed through bilateral channels, as it is often linked to particular foreign policy interests. Yet, over time the literature of development studies has also incorporated the notion of trilateral development cooperation “as international cooperation with the explicit goal of advancing development, involving three partners” (Grimm et al. 2010b).

Originally, the concept of trilateral development cooperation has emerged in the 1960s and is closely linked to the notion of “South-South cooperation” (SSC). Originally, South-South cooperation reflected the growing interaction between developing countries during the 1950s and 1960s. More broadly speaking, it describes an exchange of resources, technology and knowledge between developing countries. From a historical point of view, South-South relations finds its origins in the end of colonialism and was symbolised by the 1955 Bandung conference, where leaders from Africa and Asia came together to express the voice of the “South” (Kragelund 2011b). South-South cooperation also became a development philosophy, challenging traditional North-South cooperation. Some leading developing countries like China stress that their financial support to other developing countries is based on mutual benefits and partnership, rather than on what is considered an asymmetric donor-recipient relationship. Indeed, South-South cooperation is primarily based on trade and investments and operates outside of the OECD’s Development Assistance’s (DAC) framework of ODA.

As a response to growing South-South cooperation, the traditional donor community – in particular the United Nations (UN) and the OECD DAC – have started advocating the concept of trilateral cooperation. The UN has been leading this process (Mehta and Nanda 2005). In 1972 a working group on technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) was established within the UN General Assembly, which was followed by the creation of a special unit for South-South cooperation in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1978. A key motivation driving

triangular cooperation was to find ways to bridge South-South cooperation with traditional North-South cooperation, to establish a North-South-South partnership (Pollet et al. 2011). Moreover, trilateral development partnerships reflect the idea that traditional donors can benefit from the particular experience of emerging developing countries like China, with a record of lifting millions of people out of poverty.

Yet, the ways of dealing with South-South cooperation vary from one multilateral donor organisation to another, which explains the diverse definitions of trilateral development cooperation. According to the UN, trilateral development cooperation is a form of cooperation whereby “OECD/DAC donors or multilateral institutions [provide] development assistance to Southern governments to execute projects/programmes with the aim of assisting other developing countries” (ECOSOC 2008: 3). Hence, from the UN’s perspective the main objective of trilateral development cooperation is the financial support to South-South projects initiated by developing countries. By contrast, the OECD’s understanding of triangular development cooperation involves “partnerships between DAC donors and providers of South-South cooperation to implement development cooperation programmes in beneficiary countries” (Fordelone 2010; OECD 2009). By referring to partnerships, the OECD’s definition of triangular cooperation goes beyond the UN’s financial support for SSC and requires a joint implementation of projects between traditional DAC donors and developing countries.

## **2.2 AN ORIGINAL FRAMEWORK OF TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

Due to the increasing weight of China, India and Brazil in the world economy, we currently witness a new-found interest in the potentials of South-South relations and trilateral cooperation (Kragelund 2011b). A number of recent empirical studies have specifically examined trilateral cooperation in African countries, such as Rwanda (Grimm et al. 2010b), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Pollet et al. 2011) and Ethiopia (Hackenesch 2011). Yet, in terms of analytical approach, the existing terminology of trilateral development cooperation dating from the 1960s has been of little help in unpacking the changing dynamics of the current international donor landscape. In contrast to the 1960s, we presently observe an unprecedented increase of aid from a limited number of emerging donors, notably China, India and Brazil. In addition, there is a growing diversification of the geographical scope of the activities of these emerging donors. In the past, emerging donors and beneficiary countries were mostly located in the same region (Ashoff 2010). For instance, China and India were mainly involved in projects in Asia, while Brazil was active in Latin America. Today, all three emerging donors are engaged in South-South cooperation outside of their own region, in particular in Africa. Against the background of this rapidly changing donor environment, scholars have pointed out the limits of conventional notions of International Relations theory and development studies, such as the “South”, the “Third World”, the “North” or the “West” to explain current global realities (Harris et al. 2009).

In order to fully grasp the new donor landscape, this paper proposes lays out the foundations of an innovative framework of trilateral development cooperation. The proposed framework focuses on two particular aspects: firstly, it clearly delimits the actors involved in trilateral development cooperation and secondly it sheds light on the distinctive quality of this type of partnership as compared to existing efforts of bilateral and multilateral development collaboration.

### ***Actors involved in trilateral development cooperation***

Unlike the conventional nominal definition of trilateral cooperation, this paper puts forward an understanding of trilateral development cooperation which does not only entail three partners, but rather three categories of actors (Mehta and Nanda 2005: 115; Pollet et al. 2011). These three different categories are defined as follows: traditional donors, emerging donors and African beneficiaries. Moreover, the definition laid down in this paper also encompasses two or more representatives of each of the three groups, for instance both EU institutions and single member states can act as a traditional donor. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of each group of actors participating in trilateral partnerships.

Development scholars commonly refer to *traditional* or *established donors* as all members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the multilateral donor community more broadly. IR literature proposes several definitions of multilateralism. While some scholars use a nominal definition of multilateralism as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states" (Keohane 1990: 731), others call for a qualitative definition, which takes into account the different type of relations. For instance, Ruggie defines multilateralism as "coordinating relations among three or more states" according to "generalised principles of conduct" that order these relations (Ruggie 1992: 567). In addition, from a qualitative perspective, multilateralism implies specific institutional arrangements such as an independent secretariat. The UN with its different bodies and programmes is one of the most prominent examples of a multilateral donor organisation.

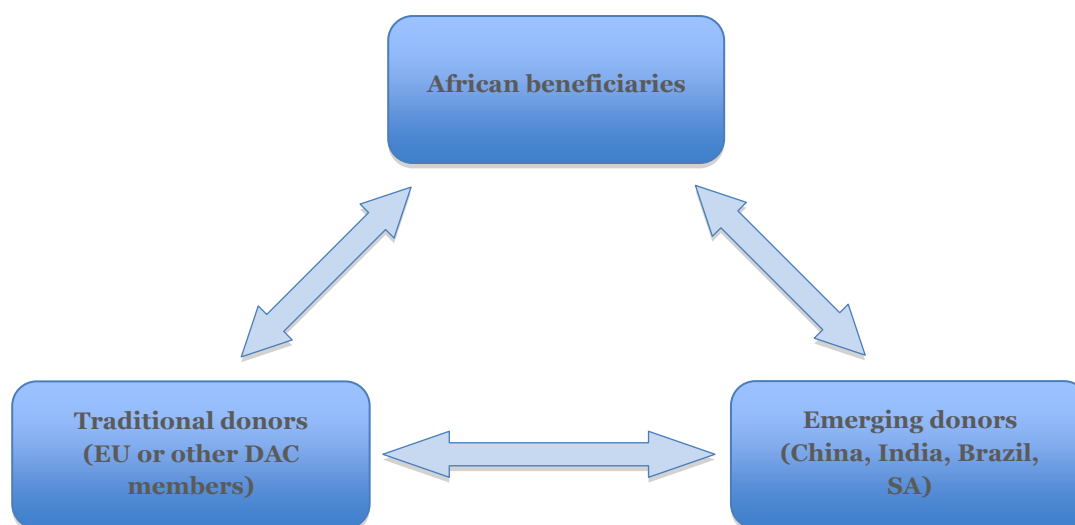
There is some confusion among scholars and experts on the relationship between trilateral and multilateral development cooperation. In fact, in the current scholarly and policy discourse trilateral cooperation also covers activities of multilateral donor organisations with emerging donors to the benefit of a developing country (Brautigam 2009; Grimm et al. 2010b; Rampa and Bilal 2011). An example for this type of tripartite cooperation is China's "in-kind" contribution with experts to UN projects in Africa, mainly in the field of agriculture (Brautigam 2009: 691; Brautigam and Xiaoyang 2009). The ambiguity between multilateral and trilateral development cooperation is mostly due to the fact that the notion of trilateral or triangular cooperation emerged from multilateral organisations such as the UN and the OECD. For instance, within the framework of the international aid effectiveness agenda, the 2006 Accra Agenda for Action explicitly calls for supporting trilateral cooperation.

In order to allow for conceptual clarity, this paper defines trilateral cooperation as a separate notion to bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. Based on the qualitative definition of multilateralism, this paper proposes to look at trilateral cooperation as an alternative form of cooperation involving more flexible principles and norms than those promoted by multilateral organisations such as the UN or the OECD. Hence, the definition of trilateral cooperation put forward in this paper excludes multilateral donors from the group of traditional donors. However, the EU is considered an exception to this. This exception is justified by the fact that the EU is a member of the OECD DAC and is treated in the literature as a state-like actor. The EU's separate contribution to multilateral organisations such as the UN or the OECD is also demonstrated by the fact that the EU's key strategic document – the 2003 European Security Strategy (EES) – describes “effective multilateralism” as one of the leading principles driving the EU's foreign policy (Council of the EU 2003; Grimm 2011a).

The second category of actors involved in trilateral development cooperation concerns *emerging donors*. These are donors, which do not belong to the OECD DAC. Hence, the academic literature also calls them “non-DAC donors” (NDD) or “non-OECD donors” (Kim and Lightfoot 2011). Scholars have developed different categories of emerging donors (Grimm and Hackenesch 2012). This paper takes the BRICs-label as the starting point for the definition of “emerging donors”, with the exception of Russia. Although Russia has lately also stepped up its presence on the African continent, it is excluded from the group of “emerging countries”, because of its different historical relations with African countries and its diverging aid model (Mwase and Yang 2012). Apart from Russia, South Africa represents another ambivalent case for an emerging donor. Since 2011, South Africa has joined the BRICS club and is also providing aid to other African countries. At the same time, South Africa is a major recipient of aid from the EU. This paper therefore attributes to South Africa a dual role in trilateral development cooperation of both an emerging donor and an African recipient.

Finally, the last group is composed of the *African beneficiary* of trilateral development cooperation. This category mostly includes states from the African continent, namely the traditional 54 African states member of the UN and the Republic of South Sudan, which became independent on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 2011 and recently also became a member of the UN. Figure 3 provides an overview of the three different categories of actors involved in trilateral development cooperation. In accordance with the principle of African ownership, the African recipients are placed on top of the triangle.

**Figure 3: Actors involved in trilateral development cooperation**



***The distinctive quality of trilateral development cooperation***

The second element of the definition of trilateral development cooperation consists of the specific nature of this type of cooperation. Existing development cooperation between the EU, China and African states follows either bilateral or multilateral characteristics. These two forms of development cooperation however face major obstacles. Bilateral initiatives between the EU and China to foster African development undermine one of the key principles of development policy, which is African ownership. While multilateral development cooperation within existing donor institutions provides the possibility of greater African participation, it often undermines one of the “leitmotiv’s” of development policy, which is partnership. According to Chinese and also African policymakers, most multilateral development institutions are based on a set of strict rules, which have been established by a minority of industrialised countries. According to this perspective, multilateral cooperation consists of efforts by traditional donors to impose on China and other emerging donors the adoption of these pre-established norms. Scholars have therefore argued that, instead of creating a partnership – based on new set of commonly agreed rules – the multilateral engagement of traditional donors like the EU is characterised by a unilateral socialisation of emerging donors such as China (Lirong 2011).

The major impediments outlined above explain why recent bilateral and multilateral efforts by the EU and China are, in the best case, limited to “coordination”, meaning that two different development approaches work simultaneously in a coordinated way, in order to avoid overlap or duplication (Chandy and Kharas 2011). As opposed to “coordination”, this paper adopts a definition of trilateral development “cooperation”, which goes beyond mere coordination and which requires all three groups of actors to unite and do things together. This is referred to by Li Xiaoyun and Thomas Bonschab as the “strong” definition of trilateral cooperation (Li and Bonschab 2011). According to Ngaire Woods, in the current donor system only little donor “cooperation” takes



place (Woods 2011). Hence, what distinguishes existing bilateral and multilateral coordination from the concept of trilateral development cooperation is the fact that trilateral cooperation is based on a genuine partnership between three types of actors. Experts stress that an essential feature of trilateral development cooperation projects is that they are jointly planned, financed, implemented and monitored by all three sets of actors (Altenburg and Weikert 2006; Altenburg and Weikert 2007; Li and Bonschab 2011). In contrast to bilateral and multilateral coordination, trilateral development cooperation is aimed at a symmetric and flexible partnership between three equal partners.

### **3. CHINA'S RESPONSE TO THE EU'S POLICY PROPOSAL FOR TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

This third section outlines the policy process around the 2008 European proposal for trilateral development cooperation with China and Africa. Following an overview of the EU's internal dynamics, a particular attention is attributed to the Chinese policy response to the EU's initiative. This section argues that due to internal disagreement, as well as external resistance, the European policy initiative has largely failed. However, recent policy shifts in the Chinese and the European aid policy towards Africa have created a positive momentum for reconsidering the option of trilateral cooperation between European, Chinese and African partners.

#### **3.1 THE IMPEDIMENTS TO THE EU'S TRILATERAL COOPERATION PROPOSAL**

As from 2007 the EU has engaged in efforts to establish a trilateral cooperation scheme with both Chinese and African partners, while simultaneously engaging with China on Africa at bilateral and multilateral level. The European Commission – as the executive body of the EU, responsible for proposing new policies and legislations – has taken the lead in the formulation of the EU's trilateral cooperation proposal. In the view of adopting a specific policy document on trilateral cooperation, Commission officials launched two preparatory initiatives. The first initiative was the organisation of an international conference entitled “Partners in Competition? The EU, Africa and China” in June 2007 in Brussels. This conference brought together a wide range of European, Chinese and African actors, including policymakers, business representatives, academics, NGOs and journalists (Wissenbach 2007). The importance attributed to this event by the European Commission was reflected in the invitation of high-ranking European and Chinese political representatives such as the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel and the Special Representative of the Chinese Government for African Affairs Liu Guijin. From the EU's perspective, the conference was conceived as an informal consultation among European, Chinese and African stakeholders helping to identify possible issue areas for trilateral cooperation. In parallel to this first informal public consultation, the Commission launched a second official



written consultation. During the period between April and June 2008, the Commission formally called for written input from European, Chinese and African representatives, which would directly feed into the publication of a communication on trilateral cooperation with China and Africa (European Commission 2008a).

Following the first informal consultation method and the second official public consultation procedure, the Commission adopted in October 2008 a communication entitled “The EU, Africa and China: Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation” (European Commission 2008b). Interestingly, the policy document does not provide an exact definition of the concept of trilateral cooperation. Instead it refers to “a cooperative three way agenda with both our African and Chinese partners in a number of areas where synergies and mutual benefits can be maximised”. The communication proposes four different areas for possible cooperation (Grimm 2008; Grimm 2011a), that is to say peace and security, infrastructures, sustainable management of the environment and natural resources, as well as agriculture and food security. Unlike previous European policy documents aimed at a bilateral EU-China dialogue on Africa, the 2008 communication uses a less normative language, by stressing that the three guiding principles of trilateral cooperation are: a pragmatic and progressive approach, a shared approach and effective aid.

Regardless of the fact that the Commission’s proposal was endorsed by the Council of the EU – the EU’s main decision-making institution – on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 (Council of the EU 2008), it sparked considerable internal disagreements. Even within the European Commission itself, there was only little consensus among the different Directorate-Generals (DGs) (Carbone 2011). Moreover, the Commission’s pragmatic approach towards trilateral cooperation with China and Africa was criticised by the European Parliament (EP), which sees itself as the champion of European values of democracy, good governance and human rights. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2008 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on “China’s policy and its effects on Africa” (European Parliament 2008). It was the outcome of a draft report released by the rapporteur of the development committee, MEP Ana Gomes. Although the tone of the initial draft report – drafted in close coordination with the Commission – was rather similar to that of the Commission’s communication, the final resolution clearly illustrates the normative divide between the European Parliament’s take and the European Commission’s stand on trilateral cooperation. The divergent opinions on the Commission’s trilateral communication mostly resulted from two competing visions of the objective of trilateral cooperation with China and Africa. Whereas some EU officials viewed trilateral cooperation as a means of establishing a genuine partnership with China, others approach it as a policy tool aimed at the socialisation of China to European development norms and procedures.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from internal European disagreements, the EU’s policy proposal for trilateral cooperation also faced major resistance from the Chinese and African side (Stahl

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews with EU officials, Brussels, September 2011.

2011b). One of the key reasons for the lack of external support for the EU's trilateral offer was the fact it reached out to only one partner. In spite of the label of "trilateral EU, Africa and China cooperation", the Commission's communication was in fact mostly addressed to Chinese audience. European officials believed that by calling the initiative a "trilateral" partnership they would be able to circumvent China's opposition to bilaterally engage with the EU on Africa. Yet, even under the smoke screen of a trilateral cooperation the EU faced difficulties in entering into a dialogue with Chinese officials on Africa, as shown by the repeated attempts of Commissioner Louis Michel to travel to China to meet with adequate counterparts (Falletti 2007). The EU's difficult consultations with Chinese policymakers largely explain the delay of the release of the Commission's communication, which was originally planned for before the EU-Africa summit in December 2007 (Carbone 2011: 213; Tywuschik 2007). There are mostly two reasons for the Chinese indifference to the EU's offer. Firstly, Chinese policymakers were uneasy with the lack of a coherent European approach towards trilateral cooperation. Although the Commission's communication expressed a pragmatic approach, the Chinese leadership saw in the EU's trilateral cooperation proposal – similarly to existing multilateral cooperation efforts – an attempt by the EU to induce China to a set of pre-established European or international donor rules. This would contradict the idea of a partnership involving a process of shared practices. Secondly, based on China's self-perception as a developing country, Chinese representatives repeatedly reminded their European counterparts that African support is considered by China as one of the pre-conditions for trilateral cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

The Chinese call for African ownership exposes the insufficient consideration of Africa in the EU's trilateral proposition. Because European policymakers were mostly concerned with China's consent, they failed to reach out to the primary targets of the policy proposal, namely African representatives. Although there are different accounts on the degree to which African representatives have been involved in the trilateral dialogue (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009; The Guardian 2010), most experts have pointed out that the EU has largely neglected the position of African recipients. According to European policymakers, the trilateral communication was primarily addressed to the African Union (AU). Scholars and even EU officials themselves however agree that this has been a mistake, as the EU has largely overestimated the capacity of the AU to represent the interests of the different African countries (Carbone 2011; Grimm and Hackenesch 2012).<sup>3</sup> The AU has initiated only a limited number of discussions and its members could not agree on any common response to the EU's trilateral proposal. Due to the EU's focus on the AU, the EU has not consulted Regional Economic Communities or individual African states. Because of this lack of interaction, African heads of state and government largely interpreted the EU's trilateral initiative as a power instrument of the EU and China to negotiate above the heads of Africans.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Chinese official, Brussels, September 2011; Interview with Chinese official, Beijing, November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with EU official, Brussels, September 2011.

Consequently, African policymakers expressed a fierce rejection of the EU's proposal.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they advocated for a strategy of continuing bilateral relations with both the EU and China, which would leave them the possibility of playing out one donor against the other and select the offer of the best bidder (Pollet et al. 2011).

**Box 1: Trilateral development cooperation between  
European member states, China and Africa**

Former European colonial powers like the United Kingdom (UK) and France have established their own bilateral dialogue with China on Africa. While for the UK development represents an important part of the dialogue with China on Africa, French policymakers mostly discuss African security issues with their Chinese counterparts. By contrast, Germany does not have a specific policy dialogue with China on Africa, but regularly exchanges with Chinese policymakers on development issues in Africa. Concurrently, also smaller EU member states such as Belgium and Denmark have shown interest in a closer exchange with Chinese policymakers on Africa.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued in the beginning of this year a detailed study exploring China-Denmark development cooperation in Africa (Patey et al. 2012).

In terms of concrete projects, the British Department for International Development (Dfid) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) are most active. Yet, none of the existing projects in Africa involving a single EU member state and China correspond to the strong definition of trilateral development cooperation proposed by this paper. On the one hand, the majority of the projects are following a bilateral, rather than a trilateral structure, lacking active involvement from the African partner. On the other hand, the Chinese contribution is still rather minor as compared to that of the European partner. Instead of establishing a joint project in Africa, European donors often provide additional funding to already existing Chinese projects and rename it a “trilateral” project.

In sum, through this section it has become evident that the EU's policy initiative did not correspond to what has been outlined in this paper as a new form of trilateral development partnership. Despite the name of “trilateral” cooperation, the 2008 policy proposal was in fact a unilateral Brussels-based endeavour, which largely explains its failure (Tywuschik 2007).

Yet, irrespectively from the failure at EU-level single member states have started to put forward the idea of trilateral partnerships with China and Africa. Over the past years, several European states have shown keen interest in establishing trilateral development projects with China in different African countries. This has further undermined the

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with South African official, Pretoria, February 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with European diplomats, Beijing, November 2011.

EU's efforts of building a trilateral development partnership with China and Africa. It also exposes the EU's difficulties in relating with external partners as a coherent actor (Stahl 2011b). For instance in Beijing, there is only little exchange of information between member states regarding trilateral projects and the EU delegation is not keeping systematic track of the various member states initiatives.

Since the 2008 fiasco, the EU has undergone important changes, some of which might favour the implementation of more genuine trilateral development cooperation and benefit a more symmetric EU-China partnership. For instance, the EU's institutional changes after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty have contributed to more coherence in the EU's external relations. As a consequence of the creation of the External Action Service (EEAS) and the transformation of the Commission's DG DEV into DG Development and Cooperation – Europeaid (DG DEVCO) “the EU's development cooperation agenda has become increasingly interlinked with foreign policy and strategic objectives” (Humphrey 2010). Moreover, cooperation with emerging donors has become a key feature of the current reform of the EU's financial development instruments. The new European development policy strategy proposed by the European Commission as “Agenda for Change” calls for a “differentiated EU approach to aid allocation and partnerships” (European Commission 2011). This implies a phasing out of EU grant aid to emerging or middle-income countries such as China, which are now perceived by the EU as partners in international development efforts rather than aid recipients. Trilateral cooperation is explicitly mentioned as a new policy tool for the EU's different development relationship with emerging countries. However, for trilateral cooperation to actually work, a change in the EU's discourse is not enough, but fundamental innovations in the policy structure needs to follow (Li and Bonschab 2011).

### **3.2 CHINA'S POLICY RESPONSE**

As the 2008 EU proposal for trilateral development cooperation was a specific rapprochement attempt from Brussels with Beijing, it is crucial to examine the Chinese policy debate around trilateral development cooperation with the EU and Africa. As outlined, Chinese leaders have responded cautiously to the EU's attempts of entering into a trilateral development partnership (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009). In fact, the Chinese leadership has been surprised by the sudden international attention brought to its Africa policy. Because Chinese aid is traditionally distributed through bilateral frameworks, Chinese leaders did not see any need for a trilateral cooperation involving also the EU. On the contrary, Beijing was concerned that a dialogue with the EU or any other traditional donor in Africa would undermine China's distinctive identity as a developing country, engaged in an equal South-South cooperation with African developing countries. In its policy discourse, the Chinese leadership underlines that the Chinese external assistance to Africa is different to that of traditional donors like the EU. China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence play a key role in this regard. They attribute a particular importance to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which contradicts the EU's principle of aid conditionality.

Chinese policymakers have stressed the supposed incompatibility between European development norms and pre-existing Chinese values to explain their reluctance to engage in trilateral development cooperation with the EU.

Apart from the contradiction between European and Chinese development norms, the failure of the EU's initiative is also based on China's inability to identify a responsible institution to deal with trilateral cooperation. It is suggested that one of the reasons for the cancelation of the two visits of Louis Michel was the fact that the Chinese authorities were not able to propose adequate interlocutors to discuss the idea of trilateral cooperation. Indeed, scholars have underlined that a development community is missing in China and that the EU is therefore lacking a natural partner for trilateral development cooperation (Grimm and Hackenesch 2012). In fact, there are a number of different institutions governing China's development assistance to Africa. This has encouraged rivalry between the various bureaucratic agencies, in particular between the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (Corkin 2012). The MOFA hosts the secretariat of the FOCAC and has a particular political expertise regarding Africa. Despite being equal to the MOFA in the institutional hierarchy, the MOFCOM has become the leading government body involved in the management of aid to Africa. While MOFCOM's Department of Economic Cooperation is responsible for incoming aid to China, the Department of Foreign Aid administers China's outgoing development assistance (Hackenesch 2009). The Ministry of Finance (MOF) collaborates with the MOFCOM in distributing part of China's budget to foreign aid. Moreover, specific line ministries for health or education receive from MOFCOM specific aid budgets, which they can use for trilateral projects (Grimm et al. 2011; Patey et al. 2012). Finally, China's policy banks, most importantly the Export-Import Bank (EXIM) play a crucial role in China's external assistance to Africa (Brautigam 2009; Hackenesch 2009).

Originally, European officials engaged in talks with Chinese representatives from the MOFA. Recently, the EU has however put more emphasis on exchanges with representatives from MOFCOM.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as long as there is no clear guideline on trilateral cooperation from the State Council, officials from ministries have only limited leeway in their discussions with the EU. This lack of direction explains why there is confusion within the MOFCOM between the Department of Foreign Aid and the Department of Economic Cooperation as to who has the competence to discuss trilateral development cooperation projects with European donors. It seems that due to their longstanding contacts with European donors, officials from the Department of Economic Cooperation are more incline to engage in trilateral projects as compared to their colleagues from the Department of Foreign Aid.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interviews with European diplomats, Beijing, November 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with Chinese officials, Beijing, November 2011; Interviews with European donors, Beijing, November 2011.

Another factor hindering the implementation of the 2008 Commission proposal have been tensions characterising the overall EU-China diplomatic relations, which eventually led to the cancellation the EU-China summit planned for November 2008 in Lyon. In this difficult context, the release of the critical resolution of the European Parliament on Chinese Africa policy exacerbated the Chinese leadership. At a press conference Jiang Yu, spokesperson of the Chinese MOFA stated that, “we have taken note of the European parliament’s criticism on China’s policy toward Africa. This is a highly irresponsible and unfounded accusation in disregard of the facts. We urge the European parliament to stop the confrontational and provocative act and do more in the interest of China-EU relations” (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008).

Despite Chinese scepticism over the real intentions of the EU’s dialogue proposal, recent modifications in the Chinese foreign aid policy have made the Chinese leadership more open to possible cooperation with traditional donors in Africa. While within EU circles the issue of trilateral cooperation has lost momentum after the 2008 debacle, in Beijing the topic has become increasingly popular among Chinese scholars (Li Anshan 2011; Luo and Zhang 2011; Xu 2011) and policymakers (China Daily 2012). Chinese foreign aid policy being a relatively new policy field, the Chinese government has started realising the necessity of learning from traditional donor practices, in particular in terms of social and environmental standards, but also to guarantee political stability in African countries. The shift in China’s foreign aid policy was symbolised by the publication of the 2011 White Paper on Foreign Aid (Chinese State Council 2011). The White Paper presents an attempt of the Chinese leadership to respond to international criticisms.<sup>8</sup> In particular, it tries to address the lack of transparency of Chinese aid by providing some broad aggregated figures of Chinese aid (Grimm et al. 2011). Most importantly, the White Paper devotes an entire section to international cooperation.

In terms of international cooperation, there is empirical evidence of an increasing Chinese involvement in multilateral development cooperation (Luo and Zhang 2011). The most prominent example has been the China-DAC Study Group. Unlike Japan and South Korea, China is not a member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which represents a multilateral framework in which traditional donors coordinate their external assistance policies. In order to bring China closer to the international donor community a particular Study Group of representatives from China and the OECD DAC secretariat and DAC donors was established in January 2009. Yet, the overall outcome of the Study Group has rather been limited for two main reasons. Firstly, the China-DAC possesses only a limited mandate, which does not involve the agreement of binding decisions. Instead, the Study Group can only serve as what some European representatives condescendingly called a “talking shop”. Secondly, the exercise of the Study Group has shown that Chinese leaders do not intend to officially join the OECD DAC. From the Chinese perspective, the OECD DAC is a club of developed, Western countries. By joining it, China would call into question its status as a

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with Chinese officials, Beijing, November 2011.

developing country and provider of an alternative type of South-South development assistance (Stähle 2008).

Based on the limited Chinese support for multilateral development organisations, Chinese leaders have a clear preference for more flexible trilateral development cooperation. Unlike multilateral cooperation along pre-established rules, trilateral cooperation would allow Beijing to contribute to a set of new rules and procedures (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009). Furthermore, trilateral cooperation better suits Chinese demands for concrete cooperation projects. Despite the fact that some experts have seen in the release of the 2011 Chinese White Paper a sign of the State Council's willingness to engage in trilateral cooperation (Patey and Large 2012), it seems though that there are still important discussions within the Chinese leadership on the overall position to adopt towards trilateral development cooperation. This is mostly reflected in the ambivalent position of the Ministry of Commerce, which lacks a clear overall guideline from the States Council. Moreover, MOFCOM's Department of Foreign Aid is understaffed and is therefore unable to deal with all the cooperation requests from individual EU member states (Patey and Large 2012).<sup>9</sup>

In sum, notwithstanding the practical challenges both on the European and the Chinese side, which have led to the failure of the EU's 2008 trilateral initiative, this section has demonstrated that there is at present a more constructive approach both within the EU and China. This could eventually create the necessary momentum for launching a genuine trilateral development partnership between the EU, China and Africa. Yet, a key element for successful trilateral development cooperation remains the African partner. This matter will be further addressed in the upcoming section.

#### **4. SOUTH AFRICA AS A POTENTIAL PARTNER FOR TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

Based on the EU's 2008 proposal, African representatives conceive trilateral development cooperation primarily as a mechanism to promote the interests of traditional donors and reducing Africa's bargaining power (The Guardian 2010). Yet, while "there is still no strong advocate of the [trilateral] process among African states, regional organisations or continental bodies" (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009), there has been some rethinking among African scholars and policymakers on the potential of trilateral development cooperation.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging the fact that China is increasingly willing to engage in a dialogue with traditional donors like the EU, some African stakeholders have started to think about best ways of how they can get involved in this initial exchange between traditional and emerging donors, instead of simply being a bystander. While Africa is largely underrepresented in multilateral fora, a key

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Chinese official, Beijing, November 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with South African official, Pretoria, February 2012; Interviews with European diplomats, Pretoria, February 2012.

interrogation is whether trilateral cooperation could become a better-suited tool for African stakeholders to participate in the donor exchange between the EU and China.

This last section will take the example of South Africa to further investigate this matter. As compared to other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa presents specific economic and political features (King 2010). It is therefore not surprising that it is a strategic partner of both the EU and China. The choice of South Africa as a case study for potential trilateral cooperation with the EU and China is based on two main arguments. Firstly, South Africa holds the dual position of that of an African developing country and that of an emerging economy. This provides South Africa with greater economic and political leverage than other African countries. Hence, South Africa presents one of the most likely cases of an African country being able to use trilateral cooperation with the EU and China as a tool to promote its own interests. Secondly, because of its high level of infrastructure development relative to the rest of the African continent and its geographic location at the southern tip of the African continent, South Africa holds a “gateway” function for foreign countries that want to engage with the African continent. Moreover, South African leaders support regional integration through SADC and traditionally follow a strategy of continental leadership (Alden and Soko 2005). Under the leadership of former President Thabo Mbeki South Africa endorsed a pan-African agenda of “African renaissance” and became one of the architects of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) (Le Pere and Shelton 2007). It is therefore not surprising that South Africa acts as the African representative in international bodies such as the G20 (Niu 2011).

Based on the scheme of trilateral development cooperation presented in section 2 of this paper, South Africa has the choice between two strategies of participation in a trilateral partnership with the EU and China: it could participate in a trilateral cooperation with the EU and China as a *recipient* or together with China as an *emerging donor* in projects in other African countries. These two options will be further assessed in the following paragraphs.

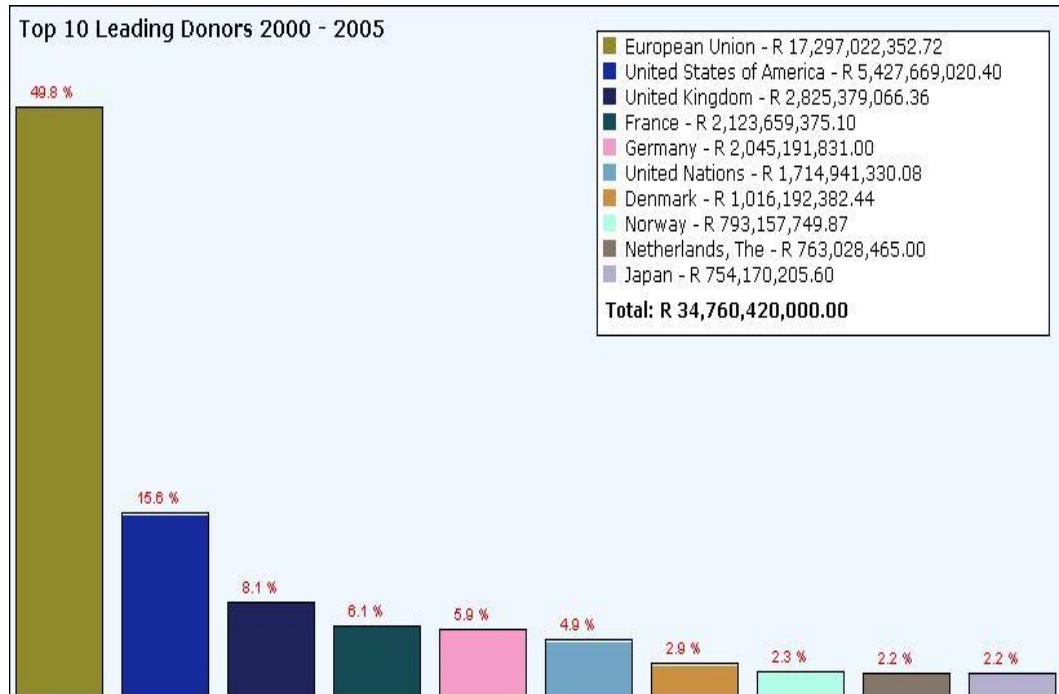
#### **4.1 SOUTH AFRICA AS A *RECIPIENT* IN TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

Following the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections in 1994 the international community re-established its diplomatic relations with South Africa and bigger amounts of Official Development Assistance (ODA) started to flow into the country. As figure 5 demonstrates the EU is one of the leading donors to South Africa. Traditionally, most of European aid is directed to strengthening democratic institutions and governance (Kragelund 2011a). Yet, the two EU-South Africa Country Strategy Papers outline that the EU also provides support for social service delivery in the area of education, health, water and sanitation, housing and urban development. Having signed the Lomé Convention, South Africa is member of the EU’s special group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP group), which is the EU’s main political framework with the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, South Africa has a specific



status, which excludes it from the intergovernmental European Development Fund (EDF). Instead, EU development aid for South Africa comes directly from the EU budget through the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

**Figure 5: Leading donors to South Africa from 2000 to 2005 (in ZAR)**



*Source: South African National Treasury*

With a per capita GDP of around 10,000 US dollars, South Africa is considered as a middle-income. Moreover, ODA to South Africa only constitutes a minor part of the countries' budget (Kragelund 2011a), around 1 to 1.5 percent of gross national income (King 2010). This difference in development stage between South Africa and other African countries has led to discussions about the need of aid to South Africa. However, within the ongoing reform of the EU's financial instruments for development cooperation it is likely that although from 2014 onwards the EU will phase out its aid to 19 middle-income countries, including China, India and Brazil, South Africa will remain a recipient of European aid.<sup>11</sup> This is also reflected by the fact that the EU delegation in Pretoria is composed of department responsible for development cooperation.

In contrast to EU, South Africa's diplomatic relations with China are very recent. It was only in 1998 that South Africa switched diplomatic relations from Taipei to Beijing (Alden 2008; King 2010). As a member of the FOCAC, South Africa receives some limited amount of Chinese aid (Centre for Chinese Studies 2007: 115). This aid is managed by the Economic and Commercial Counsellor's office, which is located in a separate building than the Chinese embassy in Pretoria. Most of the Chinese relations

<sup>11</sup> Interview with EU official, Pretoria, February 2012.

with South Africa, including development projects, follow a top-down approach directed from Beijing, leaving only limited room for manoeuvre for Chinese diplomats on the ground.

In terms of the management of the development assistance coming to South Africa, the South African National Treasury is responsible for tracking external aid funds and in particular it's International Development Cooperation Chief Directorate (IDC CD) (Braude et al. 2008). Under the auspices of OECD DAC, South Africa has been closely involved in the aid effectiveness agenda. As compared to other countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa has made important efforts in terms of donor coordination. For instance, the National Treasury organises regular donor meetings. Yet, according to some European donors the South Africa administration still lacks capacities for more efficient donor coordination.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from donor meetings, there is no official platform of interaction between the EU and China as providers of aid to South Africa. In fact, China prefers staying outside of the traditional donor community in South Africa. According to Chinese representatives the donor meetings are of only little practical use, as they do not discuss concrete projects. Yet, there is a keen interest on the European side (both in the EU delegation and member states embassies) to know more about Chinese activities in South Africa, including in the field of development assistance. The EU delegation in Pretoria - similarly to other EU delegations in Africa - has been instructed by Brussels to closely monitor the Chinese involvement in the country.<sup>13</sup> Based on input of member states embassies, the EU delegation produces regular reports on Chinese presence in South Africa.<sup>14</sup> These written contributions have however translated into only limited informal contacts between the head of the EU delegation and the Chinese ambassador. This explains why there is a lack of knowledge on each other's development programmes.

Against this background, trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and South Africa could first and foremost present a platform of exchange. Moreover, it could become a source of additional funding. Although South Africa still faces many domestic development challenges, the EU is reducing its external assistance. In particular in the area of infrastructures South Africa is still reliant on external assistance and trilateral development cooperation could provide supplementary funds both from the EU and China. China could provide relatively cheap infrastructures, whereas the EU could assist in the oversight of social and labour standards, as well as in the design of a regional approach. The contribution of the EU could also help reassuring South African trade unions, which are very critical about the behaviour of Chinese companies. For the EU, a trilateral project could be a way of learning more about Chinese external assistance, while Chinese officials are interested in concrete projects rather than cumbersome donor coordination.

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<sup>12</sup> Interviews with European diplomats, Pretoria, February 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with EU officials, Pretoria, February 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews with EU officials and European diplomats, Pretoria, February 2012.

At the same time, trilateral projects also bear non-negligible risks and challenges (Li and Bonschab 2011). An important pre-condition for a successful trilateral cooperation is that the project proposal would have to come from the South African government as the recipient. Moreover, the South African administration would have to have enough capacities to establish a framework to jointly implement such a project. This framework would have to be able to manage the different procedures and financial allocations. A genuine trilateral cooperation project would need the agreement on common procedures and common funding, which is - even if done on an ad hoc basis - very demanding. There is a risk that trilateral development cooperation creates additional bureaucracy and slows down the implementation of the project, as it is difficult to put together three different aid systems without clear rules. Finally, although the South Africa government has clear domestic development priorities which would facilitate a trilateral development project in South Africa, it is questionable to what extent South Africa would accept the role of an African recipient. Most South African officials perceive their country as an emerging country and do not want South Africa to be compared with other African developing countries. Based on this self-perception of South African policymakers, the second strategy of South Africa as an emerging donor in trilateral development cooperation might be more promising.

#### **4.2 SOUTH AFRICA AS AN *EMERGING DONOR* IN TRILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

Both the EU and China have set up a particular policy framework for their bilateral relations with South Africa separate from that with the other sub-Saharan African countries. This partly reflects the position of South Africa as an emerging economy. Similar to China, India and Brazil the EU has established a “Strategic Partnership” with South Africa in 2007 (Council of the EU 2007). This has symbolised the upgrade from a development-oriented relationship to that of a geopolitical dialogue (Grevi and Khandekar 2011). The strategic partnership involves specific annual summits, as well as a systematic exchange between both countries at technical level through working groups in various policy fields.

Economic relations between China and South Africa have been growing in recent years. In 2009, China became South Africa’s single largest trading partner. However, counted together the 27 EU member states remain South Africa’s first trading partner (Council of the EU 2011). At the same time Sino-South African economic relations are diversifying as symbolised by the purchase by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China of 20 percent of the Standard Bank of South Africa in 2007. In 2010 Chinese and South African leaders announced the establishment of a “Strategic Comprehensive Partnership”. It is an expression of South Africa’s deliberate strategy of engaging with emerging, following the creation of the IBSA Forum between India, Brazil and South Africa in 2003 (Alden and Vieira 2005). One of the main instruments of China-South Africa Strategic Partnership is a bi-national commission. This bi-national commission allows for a systematic government-to-government exchange at the deputy president/vice president and ministerial levels (Alden 2008). Moreover, South Africa

and China have signed over 50 cooperation agreements in areas such as cultures, education, tourism or science and technology. It is also important to bear in mind that due to China's diplomatic support, South Africa has recently joined the BRICS (Carmody 2012).

Development assistance consists of one of the main characteristics of South Africa's position as an emerging power. In the literature, South Africa is regularly described to as an "emerging donor", in the same way than China, India and Brazil (Kragelund 2011a). South African development assistance dates back to the apartheid period, where it was used by the regime to win friends among African countries. After the end of apartheid the new government engaged in a foreign policy of "African Renaissance" creating stronger ties with the rest of the African continent. This led to the set-up in 2001 of the African Renaissance and International Cooperation Fund (ARF) which allocates grants and loans to other African countries (Braude et al. 2008). It is managed within the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) and in particular by the multilateral African branch and NEPAD secretariat. The ARF currently accounts for around 600-800 million ZAR (Tapula et al. 2011). However, the ARF only represents a minor part of South Africa's development assistance and is complemented by other national development assistance programmes, which are spread across different government departments (Kragelund 2011a). Moreover, South Africa channels an important share of its aid through multilateral development programmes, for instance through the AU, SADEC, the African Development Bank (AfDB) or the World Bank (Grimm et al. 2010a; Parliament of South Africa 2011). This makes it difficult to provide exact figures of the overall volume of South African development assistance (Grimm 2011b; Kragelund 2011a). Estimates point to yearly expenditures of 100 million USD to 400 million USD for the period 2006 to 2010 (Braude et al. 2008; Kragelund 2011a). Hence, South African aid is still minor as compared to that of other emerging donors, in particular China. In terms of geographic distribution patterns, South Africa's development assistance is primarily directed to the SADC region and to the African continent more broadly (Grimm 2008; Grimm and Hackenesch 2012; OECD 2012). South Africa's aid is composed of loans and technical assistance.

Faced with the growing disbursement of external aid and weaknesses in the management of the ARF, the South African government has started in 2007 to establish a central agency to manage South African development assistance. Initially named South African International Development Agency (SAIDA), it is now referred to as South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA).

### **Box 2: The South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA)**

Following the adoption of a concept paper in 2009, the South African government is currently in the process of setting-up the South African Development Partnership Agency (SADPA). SADPA is conceived as a government agency for coordinating South Africa's external development cooperation assistance. Its main task is to ensure coherence throughout the management and the implementation of development projects, as well as to provide support for bilateral, multilateral and trilateral development partnerships. The new body should be endowed with its own fund (SADPA fund), which should replace the African Renaissance Fund (ARF). According to the plans, SADPA should be set-up as an entity of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DICRO). It would however enjoy some degree of autonomy in the administration and execution of programmes. SADPA will be composed of only a limited number of 7 to 20 diplomats and technical experts.

The renaming of SAIDA into SADPA, with a focus on the word “partnership”, shows similarities between the South Africa development discourse and that of other emerging donors. Like other emerging donors, South Africa relies on the concept of South-South partnership between equals and rejects the notion of “donor”. Through this discourse, South Africa wants to avoid being perceived by other African countries as a hegemon. Instead, South African policymakers stress the fact that similar to other African countries, South Africa is also a recipient of aid (Braude et al. 2008). Another important element of South Africa's conceptualisation of development cooperation is the idea of mutual benefits. Following this line of thought, South African policymakers argue that SADPA is a foreign policy instrument that does not serve only altruistic purposes, but also creates opportunities for South Africa businesses abroad (Parliament of South Africa 2011).

### **Box 3: Examples of trilateral development cooperation between European member states and South Africa in other African countries**

In 2007 Germany and South Africa established a German-South African Trilateral Cooperation Fund (TriCo Fund) allowing for joint activities in a third African country. This fund is governed by a Steering Committee composed of the South African National Treasury and the German Embassy in Pretoria and is managed by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). Initially, the TriCo Fund runs from 2007 to 2013 with a budget of 5 million Euros. Projects funded by the TriCo Fund should cover one of three thematic areas: climate and energy, good governance and HIV/AIDS. Projects which have been financed so far include a national anti-corruption training in the Democratic Republic of Congo co-organisation by GIZ and South Africa, as well as a fire management coordination

project in which South African and German experts supported Tanzania in the improvement of community based fire management.

Another example for trilateral development cooperation has evolved from the cooperation between Sweden and South Africa. In 2006 the Swedish National Police Board (SNPB) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) engage in a joint training project with the Rwandan Police Service (RPS).

Since 2000 the South African government has shown increasing interest in trilateral development cooperation with European donors in other African countries (Braude et al. 2008).<sup>15</sup> For instance, in 2008 five Nordic countries - including Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden - signed a declaration of intent with the South African government to foster common partnerships in Africa, in particular through trilateral cooperation projects. Yet, this declaration of intent did not materialise into concrete projects. An explanation for this might be the lack of an overall South African policy on trilateral cooperation. Despite a trilateral policy proposal drafted by the South African National Treasury in 2007 (Braude et al. 2008), there is still only little coordination among the different South African government departments and agencies when it comes to trilateral projects.

Most of the early trilateral projects between South Africa and European donors were undertaken in the field of security cooperation. With the expectation of the German programme, the trilateral projects were the outcome of rather ad hoc initiatives and mostly based on the input of European donors, rather than being jointly managed and financed. However, important lessons and best practices are emerging out of these initial programmes. Besides, the establishment of SADPA is likely to further promote trilateral cooperation between South Africa and traditional donors in other African countries. For now, the funds of European donors for trilateral projects with South Africa in other African countries are allocated to the South African National Treasury. From the perspective of the traditional donors, there is therefore no distinction in the procedure between trilateral development projects in other African countries and bilateral aid projects in South Africa, as the funds are always given to the South African Treasury. This procedure significantly discourages traditional donors to engage in trilateral cooperation with South Africa. Yet, with the establishment of SADPA the funds of foreign donors for trilateral project would be transferred directly to the SADPA fund and be visible as outgoing aid (Parliament of South Africa 2011).

In sum, South Africa's position as an emerging donor could positively contribute to trilateral development cooperation with the EU and China in other African countries. South Africa could act as a broker between the EU, China and the African recipient. Whereas South Africa has experience in trilateral cooperation with EU member states, its development assistance is similar to the Chinese understanding of aid. Finally,

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<sup>15</sup> Interviews with South African officials and European donors, Pretoria, February 2012.

South African policymakers have a thorough understanding of the development challenges of the African continent, in particular those in SADC region. One of the most promising fields of trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and South Africa could be security. Security is not only part of the EU's broad understanding of development, but also one of the foreign policy priorities of South Africa, which is a key supporter of the AU's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). At the same time, with recent events in Sudan and North Africa, Chinese policymakers have become aware of the importance of stability on the African continent and are increasingly moving away from a strict interpretation of the principle of non-interference (Grimm 2008; Stahl 2011a).

There are several elements showing that trilateral development cooperation with China and the EU could benefit South Africa, as it matches South African foreign policy priorities. With the growing importance of China on the African continent, South Africa's influence on the continent is likely to diminish (Carmody 2012). Trilateral development could strengthen South Africa's political role and prestige among African countries and at the same time represent a constructive response in dealing with the influence of other emerging countries like China, Brazil and India on the African continent (Braude et al. 2008). Yet, South African policymakers are also cautious about the downsides of such a trilateral cooperation with the EU and China. These concern mostly the perception by other African countries. Based on China's increasingly negative image in Africa, trilateral cooperation might spark negative feelings among other African countries and South African's civil society. It could also increase fears by African countries of South Africa's hegemonic ambitions (Alden and Soko 2005). Finally, it is doubtful to what extent SADPA will be able to provide the necessary institutional capacities for such a new mode of cooperation, which would involve a lot of bureaucracy.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The example of South Africa has shown that there are some factors conducive to a trilateral partnership with the EU and China; however, many challenges remain. On some specific aspects of trilateral development cooperation between the EU, China and Africa, broader conclusions can be drawn from the South African case.

If trilateral development cooperation is applied in a genuine manner it could indeed serve as an innovative policy instrument in the interest of all three actors, overcoming obstacles of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. A key element for achieving this is African participation and ownership. At bilateral EU-China level, the absence of African representatives is a significant impediment to cooperation. It is widely acknowledged that the EU's dialogue with China necessarily needs to involve African governments and civil society representatives, as neither European nor Chinese policymakers can claim to speak for Africans (Grimm 2008; Tywuschik 2007). By contrast, multilateral development cooperation within the UN - which allows African governments to participate in the decision-making process - faces difficulties in finding a consensus and

proposing concrete projects because of the large number of actors involved and the rather rigid procedures.

At the same time, the case of South Africa has also demonstrated the risks linked to trilateral development cooperation. Major uncertainties around the concept of trilateral cooperation both in terms of conceptualisation and practices remain. As development policies of traditional and emerging donors are managed by a set of different institutions and rules, some experts fear that trilateral projects would create additional burdens in terms of bureaucracy and procedures, which in turn would have a negative impact on aid effectiveness. In the absence of existing trilateral development projects, it remains to be seen if the strong definition of trilateral development cooperation proposed in this paper can actually be transposed into practice. The establishment of small-scale pilot projects could be a first step to assess the overall feasibility of trilateral development cooperation. It has been pointed out that the chances of success of smaller trilateral projects would be higher as compared to larger projects and they could also provide initial valuable experience (Li and Bonschab 2011).

However, some prudence is needed in generalising the conclusions drawn from the single case study of South Africa. In fact, experts have stressed that “it is far from certain that the common ground is strong enough in all (African) countries or on all issues to engage in trilateral co-operation” (Grimm 2008). It is therefore important to stress that South Africa was selected due of its particular features as compared to other African countries. Because of its political and economic weight - which makes it less dependent on aid - it is more likely to act as an equivalent partner to China and the EU in a trilateral setting. Nevertheless, it can be argued that if trilateral development cooperation would not be possible in the case of South Africa, it would be even more unlikely in other African countries.

Following the assessment of South Africa as the most likely case of trilateral cooperation with the EU and China, it is important to underline the existence of two possible strategies for South African policymakers to initiate trilateral development cooperation. Firstly, projects can be initiated with South Africa as a recipient. Alternatively, South African officials could invite China to join existing trilateral projects, with South Africa in the role of the emerging donor alongside traditional European donors in other African countries. Given the growing interest of the South African government to engage with both European and Chinese donors, the following recommendations are proposed to South African policymakers for promoting the trilateral agenda:

- South African policymakers should profit from of the momentum of SADPA to establish a clear strategy on trilateral cooperation with traditional and emerging donors.
- In terms of South Africa-EU relations, South African policymakers should strengthen trilateral cooperation with European donors in order to address the decrease of European aid to South Africa.



- In terms of South Africa-China relations, South African diplomats should introduce trilateral cooperation as a topic of discussion with their Chinese counterparts at various levels, for instance through the South African embassy in Beijing and the FOCAC.
- South Africa should raise the issue of trilateral cooperation with other African countries; for instance, it could coordinate discussions among African embassies in Beijing or put trilateral cooperation on the agenda of the AU and SADC.

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**Editorial Team**

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Matthew McDonald

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**CENTRE FOR  
CHINESE  
STUDIES**  
STELLENBOSCH - SOUTH AFRICA

**Contact Us****Centre for Chinese Studies**

Stellenbosch University

T: +27 21 808 2840

F: +27 21 808 2841

E: [ccsinfo@sun.ac.za](mailto:ccsinfo@sun.ac.za)

W: [www.sun.ac.za/ccs](http://www.sun.ac.za/ccs)